DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 434 308 CS 013 674

AUTHOR Ediger, Marlow
TITLE What Is the Reading Achievement Levels of Our Pupils?
PUB DATE 1999-09-11
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Metacognition; *Reading Achievement; *Reading Instruction; Reading Programs; *Reading Tests; *Standardized Tests; *Student Needs; Testing Problems
IDENTIFIERS *Educational Issues

ABSTRACT

This paper states that today's newspaper and educational journal articles complain that only half the school population can read on grade level. Yet standardized tests are written to spread pupils out from the first to the 99th percentile, or from three or more standard deviations above to three or more standard deviations below the mean. Standardized tests have many weaknesses in describing a pupil's present level of reading achievement. The paper lists 10 weaknesses in standardized tests, followed by five remarks about student reading often seen in news accounts. The paper calls for a vision of "what can be" in a reading program--a vision that practitioners need to articulate to parents, people in the community, and others interested in educating children. It then delineates this forward looking reading program, discussing metacognition skills, the learning environment, actively involved parents, personalized reading instruction, emphasis on the psychology of learning in teaching reading, and diagnosis and remediation in reading. (Contains 10 references.) (NKA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 434 308

What Is The Reading Achievement Levels of Our Pupils?

by Marlow Ediger

Published

1999-09-11

CS 013 674

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

M. Ediger

WHAT IS THE READING ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS OF OUR PUPILS?

There are many complaints issued in news reports pertaining to pupil achievement in reading. Hope (1997) wrote.

With so many adverse situations facing today's society, however, where does one begin to make a difference? Illiteracy is still a blight that plagues the US population. Fifty per cent of US adults are said to be functionally illiterate (Stallings, 1995). Students' inability to read and write at acceptable levels continues to beleaguer schools and the nation in the midst of the most prepared teaching force in the world. The statistics on students coming out of high school with a third grade reading level are appalling. To be a productive citizen in the twenty-first century will require more than reading and writing, but the ability to read and write are an essential prelude to acquiring other skills.

The above report sounds pessimistic indeed pertaining to the level of present reading achievement of pupils in the United States. It sounds as if the United States is on a collision course with few being able to read well enough to function effectively in society And yet, in almost every place of business presently, there is a need for more workers. "Help wanted" signs are posted in many places of business, especially in fast food and restaurants, in general. Eating establishments are very popular in the US and many, many people eat out, perhaps two to three times a day. There are additional workers needed at the work place where internet ads, newspaper advertisements, and help wanted notices are posted at entrances to these diverse work places. The way the American economy is functioning, there appears little to be unhappy about as far as high employment is concerned. The jobs are there, even if low pay is involved. The minimum wage law means little since places of business are offering well above minimum wage levels for different lower paying jobs.

Determining Reading Levels of Pupils

When attending high school during the 1942-1946 school years, an illiterate person was defined as one who could not read or write, period.

This definition has long gone out the window. Newspaper and educational journal articles complain that only half of our school population can read on grade level. I am assuming that the "one/half" figure pertains to results from standardized tests. That means that the results emphasize a normal distribution curve whereby, pupils are spread out, as test writers of standardized tests desire, in which fifty per cent read above and fifty percent read below the mean or average. The mean or average also refers to being on grade level The tests are not written in a manner whereby all will read above the mean. If this were the case, the norms would need to be revised so that again fifty per cent would be reading above and fifty percent below the mean.

There is a great lack of understanding by the lay public, public school educators, and professors as to what a normal distribution curve means when standardized test writers come up with a final version. Based on pilot studies, ratings and rankings such as percentiles, standard deviations, and stanines, as well as other statistical terms, are used to describe one pupil's achievement as compared to others.These tests are written to spread pupils out from the first to the ninety-ninth percentile, or from three or more standard deviations above to three or more standard deviations below the mean. With stanines, each pupil's test scores will be shown using a band of scores from the first to the ninth stanine. Thus, standardized tests are written and revised in pilot studies so that the range from high to low will be great as far as test results from pupils are concerned.

Standardized tests have their many weaknesses in describing a pupil's present level of reading achievement. Among others, the following weaknesses may be listed:

1. they are written in a manner whereby pupil's test results are spread out so that comparisons can be made about learner performance in reading, and other academic areas.

2. they are given at specific intervals of time such as once a year or less frequently. These one shot testings are then used to describe pupil achievement.

3. they do not measure daily performance in reading achievement.

4. they are written by measurement specialists who do not know, personally, the pupils who respond to their tests in testing situations.

5. they sample pupil word recognition and comprehension skills outside the framework of contextual reading situations.

6. they attempt to describe pupil achievement at a given time. The test results are generally not used for diagnostic purposes to ascertain what areas pupils need assistance in, such as word recognition and comprehension skills.

7. they stress test items are unrelated to each other. In the daily reading curriculum, teachers assist pupils to understand that subject matter is related in terms of content and skills.

8. they emphasize the "I caught you" approach since the goal of standardized testing is to locate weaknesses of pupil achievement at a specific time. Report cards may then be issued in newspapers and newsmagazines comparing pupil reading achievement among school districts or among states in the United States. The emphasis then is not upon assisting pupils in specific ways to improve skills in reading.

9. they do not stress a normal reading program in which learners read for a purpose. In classrooms, reading teachers have pupils read for specific reasons. When learners read library books, they have selected a book of personal interest and meaning.

10. they do not emphasize using test results for diagnostic purposes so that weaknesses in reading achievement may be located and remedied. The goals emphasized in standardized tests may show little relationship to the reading curriculum being stressed in the classroom (See Ediger, 1997, Chapter Nineteen).

Present Day Expectations of Pupil Achievement Levels

When reading the news of what is expected in terms of reading achievement of pupils, various accounts are written vaguely as well as more specifically. Each standardized test administered in a state to

report pupil achievement in reading appears to be "exact" and to be taken "literally." As was noted above, there are many loopholes in using standardized tests to report pupil progress in reading. However, the following standards or remarks are reported or stated in news accounts as to what level pupils should be reading on:

1. each pupil should be reading at least on the grade level he/she is in. Grade levels are arbitrary since a pupil, for example, may be in grade four but be rather limited in verbal intelligence. Gardner (1993) indicated different intelligences which have been identified that may be possessed. Each individual has one or more of these intelligences. One is verbal intelligence involving reading and language use.

2. social promotion should be eliminated. In response to this statement, does this mean that pupils who are not reading on grade level should be repeating a grade for having failed to read on the "desired" grade level? How many pupils would then be held back each year for having failed in reading? What would be the cumulative back log of failures then over a period of years.

3. teachers should have pupils catch up with others in being good readers, thus eliminating gaps among learners in reading achievement. I do not believe this is possible. The good readers should make continuous progress as should those less talented in reading accomplishment. Can a pupil with poor skills catch up with one who excels, such as in running races? Rather, each needs to make continuous progress as much as individual abilities permit.

4. it is a shame that pupils read only on the tenth grade level upon high school graduation. That is a puzzling remark. Reading tenth grade materials is quite sophisticated. If a person looks at and reads, even eighth grade materials, the subject matter is quite complex. I would say if a pupil reads well eighth grade materials upon graduation from high school, he/she can benefit much in reading content during leisure time as well as required reading at the work place. Each pupil in school needs to be assisted in reading instruction to do as well as possible (Ediger, 1996, 3-25).

5. pupils just are not learning to read. This statement sounds as if all pupils then will be completely illiterate. Much time should be spent clarifying what level of reading achievement a pupil should be reading at or on. The clarification needs to consider quality teaching, pupil opportunities to learn in the home and social environment, abilities possessed, class size, nature and kind of materials of reading instruction available, quality aide service available in classrooms, up-to-date reading materials, adequate wiring for internet and computer use, and the goodness/badness of the involved buildings where instruction is occurring. Shabby reading materials and obsolete school buildings will not hack it as far as facilitating reading instruction.is concerned (See Ediger, 1998, Chapter One).

A Forward Looking Reading Program

A vision of "what can be" needs to be possessed by teachers, support personnel, and supervisors of reading instruction. This vision of the ideal needs to be articulated to parents, people in the community, the business community, and others interested in the educating of children. In supervising student teachers and cooperating teachers in the public schools for thirty years, reading teachers and supervisors have stated what they believe to be a program of excellence in the teaching of pupils in learning to read well (Ediger,1999, 7-15).

Reading is an ongoing process. One has never arrived, but is attempting to improve personal skills and knowledge in reading. From the actual status of each pupil presently to an ideal or goal of excellence needs to be in the offing. Using a variety of methods and materials of instruction, pupils receive the assistance needed to be successful in goal attainment. Individual differences are provided for in that a pupil is achieving, growing, and developing as optimally as possible. Quality evaluation techniques are used to appraise learner progress in a valid and reliable way (See Duffy and Hoffman, 1999).

Metacognition skills are being developed within pupils so that each

one is monitoring his/her own progress to the best possible. Thus, each learner is taking careful note of what has been achieved in word recognition and comprehension skills as well as what is left to acquire. With metacognition, pupils individually are evaluating and taking responsibility for their very own progress.

A learning environment is there in the classroom whereby the teacher is not distracted by pupil misbehavior. Adequate support is available from school administrators and aides to prevent as well as take care of disruptions from occurring in the classroom. Each pupil is entitled to the best instruction possible without a child hindering this from occurring. Disruptions hinder good teaching from occurring and quality learning to take place in reading (Ediger, 1998, 541-548).

Parents are actively involved in helping pupils in learning to read. They realize their role in helping pupils to read at home and to achieve in school. The reading teacher needs to be available to assist parents with vital suggestions on how they may assist their offspring to achieve more optimally in reading instruction. With the home and school working together for the good of the child, improved reading instruction should be feasible. The reading teacher needs to be given time to plan for and assist parents in the arenas of teaching and learning.

Teachers need to be able to capture pupil attention in developing readiness for reading a given selection, during the actual reading of the content, and in followup activities to extend and enrich ongoing activities and experiences. Inservice education should not be overdone, but need to be stressed so that teachers use methods and materials that obtain the interests of learners in learning to read more proficiently.

Personalized reading instruction should be emphasized. Pupils individually may then choose sequential library books to read. Active involvement by the pupil is necessary to evaluate learner progress from a personalized reading program in using library books to aid achievement and progress. Personalized reading may also involve pupil's experiences which are recorded to become an important part of the reading curriculum. Thus, experience charts, at any age level, may

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

be used as materials of instruction in reading. Young learners need the guidance of the teacher to record their experiences which then might well provide content for the teaching of reading. When pupils can write up their own experiences, this is to be encouraged. The resulting material may be bound and used for rereading to reinforce needed skills and abilities in reading. The word processor should be used as early as possible to provide neat, recorded subject matter, suitable for binding, of personal experiences of pupils. Use of basal readers may be personalized in which pupils individually may be actively engaged in discussing the illustrations to provide background information for reading a given selection. Learners may also help to select new words from the content to be read so that these words might be identified as the oral/silent reading activity progresses. Pupils should be involved in predicting what will transpire in the actual reading of content and check their predicted hypotheses. The teacher needs to think through as to where and when pupil involvement in basal reading use will personalize instruction.

The psychology of learning should be emphasized in the teaching of reading. Thus, the teacher needs to assist pupils to perceive purpose in reading diverse genres in subject matter. Purpose for reading guides pupils to increase comprehension and knowledge skills in using diverse techniques to unlock unknown words. Meaning in reading comprehension is of utmost importance. If pupils do not understand what is being read, interest will wane and achievement will suffer. Also, the teacher needs to work in the direction of stimulating pupils so that increased motivation will occur. Motivated learners have an inward desire in learning to read.

Foresight needs to be in evidence as much as possible in reading instruction. Thus, the teacher removes obstacles to learner achievement in reading, prior to their happening. These obstacles include subject matter too complex for pupil comprehension, an excessive number of new words contained in a reading selection, and uninteresting content in ensuing lessons. Prior to reading a specific selections, the teacher then

might assist pupils with securing adequate background information to understand that which originally was too complex, introducing new words prior to reading so that they are identified in a meaningful way, and stressing pupil choice of subject matter to read so that interest and motivation in reading will be an end result.

Diagnosis and remediation is stressed. Pupils individually who experience specific problems in reading may then receive guidance to to take care of identified deficiencies. The learner may reveal problems such as the following which need adequate consideration and teaching to remediate: fails to use context clues to identify unknown words, does not use syllabication skills to unlock new words, and is deficient in the use of thought units when reading subject matter. Diagnosis and remediation should not destroy or minimize interest in reading, but make for feelings of a better self concept and confidence in reading for meaning (Ediger, 1999, 50-56).

Higher levels of cognition should be emphasized in ongoing reading instruction. Learners then identify and solve problems, engage in critical as well as creative thinking, and are able to red to obtain main ideas and summarize that which has been read.

The attitudinal dimension is vital for pupils to develop. Positive attitudes toward reading include a desire to read a variety of types of narrative and expository content, to read for pleasure and enrichment, and to read for personal and social development. A desire to know and comprehend is vital when thinking of pupil attitudes toward reading.

Conclusion

Each pupil needs to have optimal opportunities and chances in learning to read proficiently. The teacher, supervisor, support personnel, and parents need to synchronize their efforts in order to have pupils achieve goals directly related to achievement in reading. With coordinated efforts, the pupil should develop into becoming a good reader who accomplishes, grows, and develops. Thus, the pupil

presently might develop wholesome self concepts toward reading and achievement in general, as well as become a future quality worker at the work place.

Selected References

Duffy, Gerald G., and James Hoffman (1999). "In pursuit of an illusion: the flawed search for a perfect method." The Reading Teacher, 53 (1), 10-16.

Ediger, Marlow (1997). Teaching Reading and the Language Arts in the Elementary School. Kirksville, Missouri: Simpson Publishing Company, Chapter Nineteen.

Ediger, Marlow (1996) "Evaluation of Pupil Achievement," Education Magazine, nr. 118, 3-25. Published by the Qatar National Commission for Education, Arabian Gulf.

Ediger, Marlow (1998). Teaching Reading Successfully in the Elementary School. Kirksville, Missouri: Simpson Publishing Company, Chapter One.

Ediger, Marlow (1999). "Reading and Vocabulary." Journal of Instructional Psychology, 25 (1), 7-15.

Ediger, Marlow (1998). "Change and the School Administrator," Education, 118 (4), 541-548).

Ediger, Marlow (1999). "Evaluation of Reading Progress," Reading Improvement, 36 (2), 50-56.

Gardner, Howard (1993). Multiple Intelligences, The Theory in Practice. New York: Basic Books.

Hope, Warren C., "Meeting the Needs of Middle Level Students Through Service Learning." NASSP Bulletin, 81 (587), 42.

Stallings, Jane (1995). "Ensuring Teaching and Learning in the 21st Century." The Educational Researcher 6:4-8.